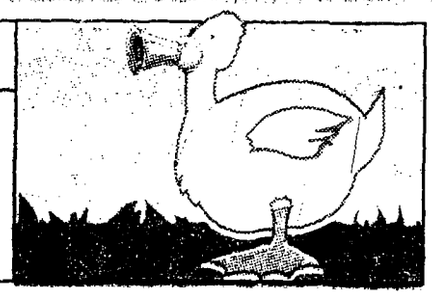
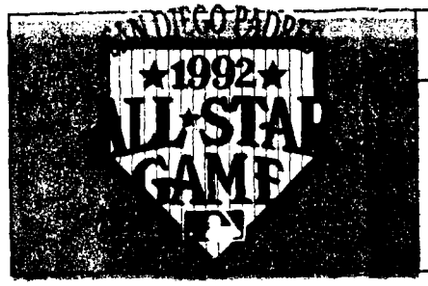
KITCHEN THRIFT

Chef uses a duck to teach how to lower costs of food

Food 1-F



SPORTS FINAL



FIVE IN A ROW

American League All-Stars rout National League, 13-6

Sports 1-G

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OHIO'S LARGEST NEWSPAPER CLEVELAND, WEDNESDAY, JULY 15, 1992

Local lead-poisoning levels soar

By JOAN M. MAZZOLINI
PLAIN DEALER REPORTER

CLEVELAND

After testing 300 Glenville-area children last summer, Cleveland health officials found that more than 50% were lead-poisoned.

"We went door to door in Glenville to screen kids who might otherwise not be screened and give out information on lead poisoning," said Wayne Slota, program manager for Cleveland's childhood lead-poisoning prevention program.

The city was anticipating stricter federal guidelines — adopted last October — that lead levels above 10 micrograms per deciliter were unsafe.

Under the old guidelines, only about 4% of 21,000 Cleveland-area children tested last year were found to have unsafe levels.

The Glenville results are consistent with an Environmental Defense Fund study showing nearly 65% of Cleveland-area preschoolers have high blood-lead levels.

The Defense Fund study is based on a 1988 study presented to Congress by the U.S. Public Health Department's Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry. The study results were based on testing of children, the age of local housing, income levels and ethnic backgrounds.

Recently, a draft report by the Environmental Protection Agency estimated at least 15% of Cleveland children were lead-poisoned. The study of six midwestern states took into account environmental factors, such as industry emissions and housing ages, but did not include the testing of any children in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio.

The author of the study, Willam Sanders III, director of the environmental sciences division of the EPA's Midwest office, said the results aren't indicative of how many local children are lead poisoned.

SEE LOCAL/13-A

Lead is kids' No.1 environment foe

By MARY H. COOPER
CONGRESSIONAL QUARTERLY

Lead poisoning savages the minds of some 3 million preschoolers and has become "the No. 1 environmental threat to the health of children in the United States," says Health and Human Services Secretary Louis W. Sullivan.

It's the nation's youngest children who are most vulnerable to the poison that attacks development of the central nervous system — causing mental retardation, learning disabilities and behavioral disorders, among other debilitating diseases. Such diseases are afflicting as many as 15% of America's preschoolers, say medical experts at the federal Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta.

In a study by the private Environmental Defense Fund, the Cleveland area ranked fourth highest nationally, with 64.7% of children aged 6 months to 5 years estimated to have blood-lead levels above 10 micrograms per deciliter, the government's new, stricter threshold for lead poisoning.

SEE LEAD/13-A

Tips about lead

The following tips are especially important for pregnant women, infants and young children.

PAINT

Houses painted before 1978 may have lead paint (most prevalent before 1950).

Any chipping or peeling is dangerous. If paint is in good condition or has been painted over, leave alone or have removed by contractor trained and certified for such work. Local governments may help.

Have children live elsewhere during sanding or scraping of older home, then rent special vacuum cleaner to remove paint dust.

WATER

Ask water department to list EPA-certified labs to test water. Soft water and acidic water are most likely to cause lead pipes (used before 1930) or solder (used before 1988) in plumbing to leach. Let tap flow 1-2 minutes before drinking or cooking. Cook with cold water.

FOOD

Imported food cans may have lead solder. The clear glaze on most ceramic ware may contain lead.

CHINA

Greatest threat posed by old, damaged or handcrafted pieces and dishes with painted or raised decorations not covered by a glaze.

Do not use these for food or drink. Avoid serving hot or acidic foods, such as tomato products, on heirloom china or on dishes with damaged glaze.

Ceramic pitchers should not be used to store acidic juices. Coffee mugs may have leaded glazes. Do not use leaded-crystal decanters for storage.

To find lead content, contact dish maker or test them. June 1990 issue of Consumer Reports lists two test kits.

Source: Congressional Quarterly

Lead

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The ranking included 20 Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas of at least 1 million population. The Cleveland SMSA includes Cuyahoga, Lorain, Lake, Geagua, Portage, Medina and Summit counties. Cincinnati ranked 16th (54.6%) and Columbus 19th (50.6%). New York City-N.J. was first (74.7%) and Kansas City, Mo.-Kan. was 20th (50.5).

And contrary to common belief, it's not just peeling lead-based paint on the walls of inner-city homes that cause all the damage.

Beverly Mielke, 3, from a middle-income, St. Paul, Minn., home was poisoned in her day-care center sandbox.

Luckily, the source of her poisoning in 1984 was discovered early, and she didn't suffer permanent injury. But her father, Howard Mielke, a toxicologist, was so appalled by the ease with which his daughter had been exposed to harmful levels of lead that he launched a statewide investigation of lead in the environment.

He discovered that dangerous amounts of this highly toxic metal can be found almost anywhere. One of the main sources was lead particles that had been spewed from cars and trucks fueled with leaded gasoline.

As a result, areas near busy roadways — including playgrounds, sidewalks and back yards — are often so tainted that they far exceed standards for hazardous-waste dumps.

Yet federal laws do not require such places to be monitored or cleaned up.

Like Howard Mielke, other American parents are finding to their surprise and horror that lead is poisoning their children, often causing permanent neurological damage — and in rare cases, death. The exposure comes from various sources, including lead-laden paint dust, drinking water and food.

Incredible as it sounds, public-health experts say that in scores of urban areas nationwide, more than l the children under age 7 suffer h some degree of lead poisoning. he high incidence of lead poisonillustrates one of the most heartking ironies in the field of public lth: Well over a decade after the ral government took steps to ainate lead from paint and gaso- l — two of the leading sources of l in the environment — lead poisng in children appears to be far re serious than previously ught.

ederal actions, to be sure, draically lowered the average blood- l levels in children after 1980, h 12.8 micrograms per deciliter to at 4 to 6 micrograms, according tthe Environmental Protection ncy.

ut meanwhile, researchers disered that even small amounts of l can cause irreversible damage in children.

Based on these findings, the Centers for Disease Control in October lowered the threshold blood-lead levels at which children are considered to be poisoned, from 25 to 10 micrograms. Now, CDC estimates show, at least 10 times more children are victims of lead-induced diseases today than in 1980.

These include young middle-class victims whose parents unwittingly exposed them to lead dust while renovating homes. This underscores the lack of general awareness of the risks of lead exposure even among well-educated, affluent parents who wouldn't dream of skimping on their children's health care.

But the highest rates of poisoning occur in inner-city neighborhoods where minority children often live.

The CDC concluded in a landmark 1988 study that a staggering 68% of all poor, inner-city black children were lead-poisoned — a percentage that is surely higher now that the blood-lead threshold has been reduced.

By comparison, the CDC found that 36% of poor, inner-city white children suffered from lead poisoning. But the agency found that black children were 10% to 30% more likely to be victims of lead poisoning than white children at all income levels, both inside and away from cities.

Black, inner-city families are more likely to live in deteriorating housing near factories, dumps and highways — sources of high lead contamination.

To prevent new cases of lead poisoning, many health professionals call for widespread lead abatement, or removal, in existing housing.

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he value is not to say this is the nber of kids in Cleveland or Day- with high levels," Sanders said. The point is to show that this is an area, compared to other comparable cities in the region, where kids are at high risk. I'm sure the number is much greater than 15%."

Area health officials believe the number of local children lead-poisoned is closer to the Environmental Defense Fund estimates.

The Centers for Disease Control has identified Cleveland and Ohio as having a large number of lead-poisoned children and have sent a consultant to work full-time in Columbus on the problem.

The city of Cleveland, with the local group Environmental Health Watch, is forming the Cleveland Lead Hazard Abatement Center to teach local residents how to remove lead from their homes and soil. The group will remove lead from homes of low-income families.

Doctors believe every child in Greater Cleveland should be tested.

"Even if you only pick up 1 child in 200 . . . it's worthwhile," said Dr. James B. Besunder, a lead-poisoning expert and director of the pediatric intensive-care unit at MetroHealth Medical Center. "We do screening on other diseases where the actual number of children with the disease are very small."